



James Comey urges FBI to maintain independence amid sacking fallout

Ousted chief calls on staff he leaves behind not to 'spend time on the decision or the way it was executed', saying bureau must remain a 'rock for America'

Sabrina Siddiqui in Washington

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The former FBI director James Comey has urged the bureau he led until his abrupt dismissal by Donald Trump to remain “a rock of competence, honesty, and independence”.

Comey addressed friends and staff in a widely reported letter on Wednesday, in which he stated his belief that Trump, as president, had a right to fire him irrespective of the circumstances.

“I have long believed that a president can fire an FBI director for any reason, or for no reason at all,” Comey wrote in the letter, which was first obtained by CNN.

“I’m not going to spend time on the decision or the way it was executed. I hope you won’t either.

“It is done, and I will be fine, although I will miss you and the mission deeply.”

The letter marked Comey’s first known comments on his firing at the hands of Trump, which sent shockwaves across the country over the timing and perceived breach of due process and natural justice. Comey was leading an FBI investigation into potential ties between the Trump campaign and Russia, and reportedly sought more resources for the inquiry in the days leading up to his removal.

“I have said to you before that, in times of turbulence, the American people should see the FBI as a rock of competence, honesty, and independence,” Comey wrote.

“What makes leaving the FBI hard is the nature and quality of its people, who together make it that rock for America.”

Here is the full text of James Comey’s letter:

To all:

I have long believed that a President can fire an FBI Director for any reason, or for no reason at all. I'm not going to spend time on the decision or the way it was executed. I hope you won't either. It is done, and I will be fine, although I will miss you and the mission deeply.

I have said to you before that, in times of turbulence, the American people should see the FBI as a rock of competence, honesty, and independence. What makes leaving the FBI hard is the nature and quality of its people, who together make it that rock for America.

It is very hard to leave a group of people who are committed only to doing the right thing. My hope is that you will continue to live our values and the mission of protecting the American people and upholding the Constitution. If you do that, you too will be sad when you leave, and the American people will be safer.

Working with you has been one of the great joys of my life. Thank you for that gift.

Jim Comey

Likened to Watergate

The White House has vigorously defended the decision to remove Comey despite condemnation from both parties in Washington.

Democrats said Trump's move echoed the Watergate scandal of the 1970s that eventually prompted the resignation of President Richard Nixon. Republicans were more muted in their criticism but raised concerns over the timing of Trump's decision, with some indicating they would join Democrats in supporting the appointment of a special prosecutor to oversee the Trump-Russia investigation.

There are three separate but parallel inquiries into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, which the US government concluded was designed to boost Trump's candidacy. The FBI investigation, with Comey at its helm, was accelerating prior to his dismissal.

His firing was recommended by the deputy attorney general, Rod Rosenstein, and the attorney general Jeff Sessions. Sessions had claimed to recuse himself from the Russia investigation in March after it was revealed he met with the Kremlin's ambassador to the US on at least two occasions and did not disclose those encounters while testifying before a Senate committee at his confirmation hearing.

The White House, along with Rosenstein and Sessions, insisted Comey had lost the confidence of the FBI and the American public. Trump told reporters on Wednesday that Comey "wasn't doing a good job", while White House spokesman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said the president had "been considering letting Director Comey go since the day he was elected".

It was only a week ago, however, that White House press secretary Sean Spicer said Comey had Trump's confidence. Trump said as much himself in an interview last month, and as a candidate heralded Comey for reopening the FBI's investigation into Hillary

Clinton's use of a private email server just 11 days before the election. Testifying before a Senate panel last week, Comey defended his highly controversial decision, which several polls found cost Clinton heavily among late-deciding voters.

"It makes me mildly nauseous to think we might have had some impact on the election," Comey said. "But honestly it wouldn't change the decision."

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